An Agent of Nature's Republic Abroad: Thomas Jefferson in Pre-Revolutionary France

By JUDITH POSS PULLEY*

"His household is *French*—his language, his dress, his manners, his associates are *French*—and his library and Philosophy are French." [1] Commendable qualities for an American minister to France perhaps; but, in the opinion of Federalists in 1800, undeniable evidence of Thomas Jefferson's unfitness for the office of president of the United States. He had spent almost six years in the rationalistic, atheistic atmosphere of pre-revolutionary France, where "his disposition to theory, and his skepticism in religion, morals, and government, acquired full strength and vigor." He returned to his native land "pervaded with the mad French philosophy." Should such a man be elected, railed a Federalist newspaper at the height of the 1800 presidential campaign, "the Constitution will inevitably fall a sacrifice to Jacobinism." [2]

The vehemence of these attacks on Jefferson's character can in part be attributed to the fierce partisanship of the campaign of 1800 and to the fears inspired in many by the excesses of the French Revolution. Although most of the charges leveled against him have since been proved groundless or grossly exaggerated, the suspicions aroused by the scurrilous tales of his political opponents still remain to haunt the Jefferson image.[3] The years he spent in France were reputedly the crucial ones, for it was there that he was said

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1. Quoted by Nathan Schachner, *Thomas Jefferson, A Biography* (New York, 1951), 640.

2. All quoted by Charles O. Lerche, Jr., "Jefferson and the Election of 1800: A Case Study in the Political Smear," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, V (October, 1948), 476, 482.

3. Modern historians generally agree that Jefferson was influenced very little by the intellectual currents he encountered in France. Rather than sitting at the feet of the *philosophes*, it was he, with his practical experience in government, who had something to offer them. For example, see Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and His Time*, Vol. II: *Jefferson and the Rights of Man* (Boston, 1951).

to have contracted the disease of Jacobinism and atheism which he carried back and spread among his countrymen. And so it is to this period of Jefferson's life one must return to understand the nature of his attachment to France and the French Revolution.

Jefferson's introduction to French culture and society came as a result of his commitment to public service. After refusing a first time, he came out of retirement at the request of Congress to accept an appointment as minister plenipotentiary, thereby filling a place vacated by John Jay. On July 5, 1784 he set sail from Boston to join his compatriots Benjamin Franklin and John Adams who had been sent to Paris to take part in the negotiation of a peace treaty with England. Their next assignment was to secure treaties of amity and commerce with interested European nations.

For several months after his arrival in France, Jefferson had relatively little contact with French society. Poor health and lingering grief over the death of his wife and more recently his youngest child, Lucy Elizabeth, caused him to restrict his social activities, and he found it more convenient to remain within the confines of the small American colony gathered in Paris.[4] Even if he had been inclined to play the role of the courtier, he would have found his opportunities rather limited as the lowest ranking member of a delegation he himself described as "the lowest and most obscure of the whole diplomatic tribe." [5]

By the spring of 1785 his health was restored and the pace of his activities began to quicken. In May he learned of his appointment by Congress to succeed Franklin as minister to the court of Versailles. Not only would he be losing the company of the witty doctor, but also that of the Adams family, for John Adams had been directed to transfer his activities to London.[6] The disintegration of the intimate group of Americans undoubtedly caused him some distress, but at the same time it forced him to broaden his social horizons.

During the first months of his residence in Paris he obviously experienced pangs of homesickness and frequently begged his friends

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4. In addition to the three commissioners, the American colony at this time included two secretaries, David Humphreys and William Short, and at various times the William Binghams. Jefferson's eldest daughter, Martha, accompanied him to Europe, and was later joined by her sister Maria.

5. Jefferson to Monroe, November 11, 1784, Julian P. Boyd and others (eds.), *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (17 vols. to date, Princeton, 1950-), VII, 512 — hereafter cited as Boyd.

6. Jefferson to William Short, May 2, 1785, Boyd, VIII, 133.

in America to keep him informed of "all the small news." [7] No doubt nostalgic memories of his beloved Virginia made France seem even more disagreeable to him. The "vaunted scene of Europe," he declared, had not impressed this "savage of the mountains of America" advantageously. He found the state of the common people truly "deplorable." And while the masses were "suffering under physical and moral oppression," the privileged few were occupied with "intrigues of love" and "ambition." He was shocked by the looseness of the conjugal bond; domestic happiness, which he so sorely missed, was utterly unknown in French society.[8]

In culture and refinement, however, the French clearly excelled. In France, he discovered, "a man might pass a life without encountering a single rudeness." In the "pleasures of the table" they were likewise unsurpassed. And the plethora of cultural advantages suddenly laid before him left him in ecstasy. Words would fail him, he assured a friend, "were I to tell you how much I enjoy their architecture, sculpture, painting, music . . . ." [9]

There was little in Jefferson's admiration for European culture, and the friends who shared his interests, that his political enemies could criticize. His preference for classical art did have ideological overtones, but they were properly republican. However, eighteenth-century France represented something more than the center of European culture. In the age of the Enlightenment, the brilliance of the *philosophes* had made Paris the intellectual mecca of the civilized world. By 1784, when Jefferson arrived, the greatest figures of the French Enlightenment had already passed from the scene. But the luster of their buoyant optimism lingered on. The continued vogue of rationalism was insured by that famous French institution, the salon. There members of the nobility and upper clergy mingled with magistrates, wealthy bourgeois, financiers, and representatives from the world of *belles lettres*. In a society whose tone was dictated by the salons, allegiance to the tenets of *la philosophie* was essential to social success.

Early in the century salon fashion had demanded a display of wit; by mid-century, with the appearance of the *Encyclopédie*, science had dominated the conversations. At the time of Jefferson's appearance, science was giving way to a newer passion, sadly noted by an *habitué* of the salons: "Today it is Politics and the Principles

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7. Jefferson to Eliza House Trist, August 18, 1785, Boyd, VIII, 404.
8. Jefferson to Charles Bellini, September 30, 1785, Boyd, VIII, 568-569.
9. *Ibid.*

of Government which have supplanted both Science and Wit, and ambassadors have elbowed physicians and poets off the stage." [10] The transition to political themes was encouraged by the critical spirit, exemplified in the *Encyclopédie,* which undermined respect for tradition and brought into question the existing society.[11]

The spirit of dissent did not in general penetrate the ranks of the provincial aristocracy, but their disinterest was compensated by the fervor of the young nobles who considered Paris their spiritual home. These young men, inspired by the writings of Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau, longed to promote reforms which, while reflecting glory upon themselves, would at the same time serve the common good.[12] The naïveté of their enthusiasm was revealed by one of their number, the Comte de Ségur:

> The smiling philosophy of Voltaire amused us and captivated us . . . . We felt disposed to follow enthusiastically the philosophical doctrines taught by these witty and daring men of letters: Rousseau touched our hearts; we experienced a secret pleasure in seeing them attack the ancient edifice which seemed to us Gothic and absurd . . . . The idea of liberty . . . pleased us by reason of its courage—the idea of equality by reason of its convenience. There is a pleasure in descending when one thinks one can ascend again at any moment . . . .[13]

The modern philosophy which looked forward confidently to the progress of the human race was rivaled in popularity, and indeed nourished by, the classical tradition. All of the young nobles had been educated in the writings of the ancients, where they discovered the glories of Greece and Rome.[14] Once again Ségur, so representative of his class, recalls the prevailing spirit:

> . . . how could the monarchical governments of Europe wonder at the enthusiasm for liberty which was manifested by young men of ardent minds, who were every where instructed to admire the heroes of Greece and of Rome, . . .

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10. La Fontaine, *Mémoires,* quoted by Louis Ducros, *French Society in the Eighteenth Century,* trans. W. DeGeijer (London, 1926), 338.
11. Daniel Mornet, *La pensée francaise au XVIIIem siècle* (Paris, 1932), 208.
12. Philippe Sagnac, *La formation de la société francaise modèrne* (2 vols., Paris, 1946), II, 226.
13. Comte de Ségur, *Mémoires and Recollections of Count Segur* (3 vols., London, 1825-27), I, 38-40.
14. Sagnac, *Formation de la société francaise modèrne,* II, 279-280.

> and who were taught to read and to reflect by constantly studying the works of the most celebrated republicans of antiquity? [15]

Republicanism, having received the endorsement of both the ancients and the modern *philosophes,* became not just respectable, but almost *de rigueur* among fashionable Parisians.

In a society where politics and republics vied with the classics for popularity, Thomas Jefferson was apt to receive a warm welcome. He was the author of the Declaration of Independence, a document permeated with Enlightenment thought, although the fact of his authorship does not seem to have been widely known. And his work in the Virginia legislature, still unheralded in France, might have persuaded the *philosophes* to proclaim him a model legislator. Like the young Ségurs, he too was the product of a classical education. He considered the study of antiquity instructive for the new republic, and in fact was a more serious classical scholar than most Frenchmen of similar background.[16] But even as a relative unknown, it was not long before Jefferson's fame began to spread among the *habitués* of the salons.

There could hardly have been a better exposition of the many facets of his mind than his *Notes on the State of Virginia,* written in 1781 in response to a series of questions about the state put to him by the secretary of the French legation, Barbé-Marbois. Jefferson had intended to have a number of copies of an expanded version of his reply printed in America, but he never found the time. So when he arrived in France, he arranged to have the work done there. By May of 1785 two hundred copies of his *Notes,* with his draft of a constitution for Virginia appended, were ready for distribution among his close friends. Undoubtedly the book quickly caught the attention of outsiders, for in a short time Jefferson learned a pirated French edition was being planned. Fearful of distortions, he agreed to allow the Abbé Morellet, a French acquaintance of liberal sympathies, to prepare an authorized translation. At the same time he arranged to have an English version published. Both editions appeared by 1787, thereby making his work readily accessible in both languages.[17] Although the book was never a pop-

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15. Ségur, *Mémoires,* I, 76.

16. This is the opinion of Karl Lehmann, who states that "Jefferson met few serious students of ancient history and literature" and cites his complaint that "nobody read the ancient authors." Karl Lehmann, *Thomas Jefferson, American Humanist* (New York, 1947), 56-57.

17. Malone, *Jefferson and the Rights of Man,* 94-98, 104-105.

ular success, it firmly established his reputation as a philosopher and scientist in intellectual circles.[18]

On his merits as a classical scholar, philosopher, and scientist alone, Jefferson would have gained admission in almost any circle of intellectuals. The fact that he was an American made his intellectual attainments and his natural refinement seem all the more remarkable. America had long been an object of interest to Europeans, as well as a symbol of hope to many of the *philosophes*. There, in a virgin land, men appeared to be working in accordance with the laws of nature to build a new order where humanity, peace, and prosperity reigned. When the colonists rose up to challenge British tyranny, French liberals interpreted their rebellion as the beginning of a cosmic struggle for the inalienable rights of man. The success of the revolution seemed to vindicate their faith that the principles of the Enlightenment—natural rights, the social contract, liberty and equality—were indeed capable of forming the basis of a free and more perfect society.[19]

In a very real sense the *philosophes* and their followers, by identifying the American experiment with their theories, had staked their reputation on the success of the new republic. Hitherto eighteenth-century reformers had drawn their knowledge of republics from classical history where they learned that republican institutions invariably occurred among small populations and disintegrated when threatened by territorial expansion or luxury. The ancient republics offered slight encouragement to those who hoped to adapt their institutions to large, luxury-loving France. And so the establishment of a republic in the broad expanses of the new world offered fresh hope to French reformers. The success of the American republic would contradict the lessons of history and affirm the possibility of radical reform, perhaps even a republic, in France.[20]

Aware of the significance of the infant republic, French reformers

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18. In the opinion of Adrienne Koch, the *Notes* are "striking symbols of what is meant by calling Jefferson a philosopher in the sense of *philosophe* — his themes are universal, his curiosity endless, his habit of reflection on all themes scientific and prudent." Adrienne Koch, *The Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, 1943), 91.

19. The entire question of the influence of the American image on the French Revolution has received expert treatment by Durand Echeverria, *Mirage in the West: A History of the French Image of American Society to 1815* (Princeton, 1957).

20. Harold Talbot Parker, *The Cult of Antiquity and the French Revolution, A Study in the Development of the Revolutionary Spirit* (Chicago, 1937), 66-70; Kingsley Martin, *The Rise of French Liberal Thought: A Study of Political Ideas from Bayle to Condorcet* (New York, 1954), 115-116.

became its unofficial publicists, zealously broadcasting its virtues and refuting those who dared to criticize it. Jefferson, as American minister to France, was just as willing as his predecessor Franklin to capitalize on this fund of good will. During the war years popular enthusiasm for the American cause had remained fairly constant. But after the glory of battle, the Americans had to prove their ability to establish a stable republican form of government. And there were some who doubted whether the two qualities—"stable" and "republican"—were in fact compatible. By late 1783 these doubts, sometimes even expressed by partisans of liberty, had combined with the misinformation usually instigated by England to produce a current of anti-Americanism in France.[21]

The most subtle and disinterested reflection upon the new world's prestige came from the highly respected French naturalist, the Comte de Buffon. The animals in America, Buffon maintained in his *Natural History,* were smaller than those found in the old world; and furthermore animals imported there from Europe degenerated in the humid climate. He also commented on the backwardness and deficiencies of the aborigines. Precisely because he respected Buffon as a scientist, Jefferson went to considerable trouble in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* to refute the Frenchman's theories.

Buffon had stated his theory with caution, but its broader implications could not be ignored. If even full-grown animals raised in Europe degenerated in the hostile environment of the new world, perhaps the same would be true for European colonists. This seemed to be a logical application of Buffon's theory, and as such the Abbé Raynal accepted it and popularized it in his *Histoire philosophique et politique, des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes.* In answer to Raynal's charge that America had produced no great men Jefferson noted the nation's relative youth, but went on to name Washington, Franklin, and Rittenhouse as products of the American environment.[22] The publication of his *Notes* gave Jefferson the opportunity to present his rebuttal of a theory which threatened to undermine popular faith in the possibility of human progress in the new world.

Other sources of anti-Americanism were less subtle. For example,

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21. Echeverria, *Mirage in the West,* 125.

22. Bernard W. Sheehan, "Civilization and the American Indian in the Thought of the Jeffersonian Era" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of History, University of Virginia, 1965), Chapter III; Ruth Henline, "A Study of the *Notes on the State of Virginia* as an Evidence of Jefferson's Reaction against the Theories of the French Naturalists," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography,* LV (July, 1947), 233-246.

the Abbé Mably in his *Observations sur le gouvernement et les lois des Etats-Unis* (1784) reflected a growing skepticism about the success of a republic uncurbed by aristocratic influence.[23] Both Jefferson and French liberals recognized the danger of this challenge to their faith in the viability of a modern republic. To counteract the effects of Mably's book, Jefferson and the Marquis de Condorcet urged Philip Mazzei, an Italian who had emigrated to Virginia, to write a refutation. The ubiquitous Italo-American approached the task with enthusiasm, and when his manuscript was completed, the friends of America anxiously gathered at "the magnificent villa of the Duchess d'Enville [mother of the Duc de la Rochefoucauld] . . . to examine [the] work." [24] The book, entitled *Récherches historiques et politiques sur les Etats Unis,* was published in 1788, possibly too late to attract the notice of a city whose attention was being monopolized by the revolt of the parlements.

Rumors of anarchy in the United States, gleefully reported by the English press, seemed to support Mably's gloomy predictions. Jefferson, whose major assignment was the negotiation of commercial treaties, considered these rumors highly detrimental to his country's reputation. No court was willing to enter into an agreement with a nation still in a state of flux. In an effort to quell such notions about the United States he frequently had favorable news items planted in the pro-American *Gazette de Leide* and other European newspapers.[25] He arranged to have the text of his Act for Establishing Religious Freedom printed and distributed among European diplomats and reported with satisfaction that it had "contributed much to convince the people of Europe, that what the English papers are constantly publishing of our anarchy, is false." [26]

French liberals, anxious for news of the smooth transition to a peacetime republican government, were likewise alarmed by the

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23. An example of the influence of Mably's opinion can be found in the reaction of the Baron de Grimm's secretary, who probably reflected the general reception of the book in high society: "He [Mably] has the good faith to admit that democracy is perhaps not the most desirable government for a people which occupies 300 to 400 leagues of coast." Maurice Tourneux (ed.), *Correspondance Littéraire, Philosophique et Critique par Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, Meister, Etc.* (16 vols., Paris, 1877-82), XIV, 50.

24. Philip Mazzei, *Memoirs of the Life and Peregrinations of the Florentine Philip Mazzei, 1730-1816,* trans. Howard R. Marraro (New York, 1942), pp. 296-298; Robert R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution, A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800: the Challenge* (Princeton, 1959), 251, 267.

25. Echeverria, *Mirage in the West,* 123.

26. Jefferson to George Wythe, August 13, 1786, Boyd, X, 244.

English efforts to sully the American image. Rumors of anarchy, the Marquis de Lafayette assured his hero Washington, hurt "their [the United States] consequence in Europe to a degree which is very distressing, and what glory they have gained by the Revolution, they are in danger of losing by little and little, at least for a period of time most afflicting to their friends." [27] Another professional American, Brissot de Warville, explained why it was so important "to refute all these lies." Many Frenchmen, he asserted, were "unfamiliar with republican constitutions and deceived by the prejudices of their education," and hence tended to "regard that form of government as equivalent to a state of perpetual chaos, in which life and property are constantly in the greatest danger." [28]

Obviously Jefferson and the Americanists had a mutual interest in preserving the good name of the United States, and it did not take them long to discover how effectively they could work together. Jefferson, because of his official position, could provide them with accurate and relatively up-to-date information; and they in turn could use their talents and influence to project a favorable American image. Thus it was not at all surprising that Jefferson's closest associates came from among the pro-American French liberals. Franklin had already cultivated their friendship and naturally paved the way for the acceptance of his successor.

Probably the best way to make acquaintances in eighteenth-century France was to gain admission to the leading salons. Jefferson had been minister to France only one month when he presented himself at the salon of Madame d'Houdetôt, hoping thereby to gain "admission . . . to the circle of literati with which she is environed." [29] The Countess, who assured Jefferson of her "Sincere attachement for the American Nation," [30] attracted a large circle of Americanists to her country home at Sannois. Jefferson also became an infrequent guest at the home of the widow of Helvétius, Franklin's beloved "notre dame d'Auteuil," and could sometimes be found at the salons of Madame Necker, wife of the sometime minister of finance, and the Marquise de Condorcet.

But the only salon he seems to have visited regularly was that of Lafayette's aunt, Madame de Tessé. There he and William Short, his secretary, could relax in the company of close friends with whom they enjoyed a perfect understanding. Jefferson never wholly ap-

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27. Lafayette to Washington, January 13, 1787, Louis Gottschalk (ed.), *The Letters of Lafayette to Washington* (New York, 1944), 319.
28. Quoted by Echeverria, *Mirage in the West*, 129.
29. Jefferson to Abigail Adams, June 21, 1785, Boyd, VIII, 241.
30. Mme d'Houdetôt to Jefferson, October 18, 1785, Boyd, VIII, 650.

proved of women forsaking the traditional occupations of the gentle sex for the masculine pleasure of political debate.[31] But he made an exception in the case of Madame de Tessé, whom Gouverneur Morris described as a "republican of the first feather." [32] Their close friendship, however, ranged beyond the realm of politics and was sustained by their common interest in art, music, architecture, and especially horticulture.

Jefferson never became an ardent *habitué* of the salons. No doubt his initial ventures into French society were undertaken in an effort to gain the confidence of young nobles whose good opinion could serve the American cause, but he preferred the company of his daughters and close friends. Perhaps too he already vaguely sensed that the zeal of many of the aristocrats who frequented the salons arose "partly from mode." [33] Few of them possessed sufficient depth to hold the interest of the Virginian's acquisitive mind, and so he rarely advanced beyond a purely social acquaintance with them. The truth of this can best be illustrated by an examination of those Frenchmen with whom he associated most frequently. Generally they offered an intellectually stimulating relationship and almost invariably they were in a position to advance the interests of the United States.

Several members of the group known as the *économistes* or physiocrats filled both of these requirements admirably and had already been recruited into the Americanist camp by Franklin. The main tenets of physiocracy, promulgated in France by Quesnay and Turgot, were derived from a belief in the primacy of agriculture as a source of national wealth and were aimed at freeing trade of all restrictions. Franklin had cultivated the favor of members of the sect by pointing out that their doctrines were in fact being realized in America.[34] Although they approved of the American experiment, not all of the *économistes* were confirmed republicans. Many were perfectly willing to allow an enlightened despot to put their laws into effect, since by so doing he would be following the laws of the natural order and therefore could not be acting arbitrarily.[35]

Jefferson had reasons of his own for desiring their friendship and support. In the first place his primary goal as United States min-

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31. Jefferson to Ann Willing Bingham, May 11, 1788, Boyd, XIII, 151.
32. Gouverneur Morris, *A Diary of the French Revolution*, ed. Beatrice Cary Davenport (2 vols., Boston, 1939), I, 6.
33. Jefferson to Richard Price, January 8, 1789, Boyd, XIV, 421.
34. Echeverria, *Mirage in the West*, 24.
35. Marius Roustan, *The Pioneers of the French Revolution*, trans. Frederic Whyte (Boston, 1926), 61.

ister was to secure further commercial privileges for his country, and so it was natural for him to seek an alliance with a group whose doctrines gave theoretical support to his demands. Besides, he himself shared their free-trade principles.[36] And as one who had composed what amounted to a bucolic hymn to agriculture—"those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God . . . whose breasts He has made His peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue"—he was bound to feel a spiritual kinship with this sect.[37]

Franklin was not the only link with the *économistes*. Another member of the sect, the Marquis de Chastellux, when visiting Jefferson at Monticello in 1782 had discovered a perfect conformity of "feelings and opinions." He and the master of Monticello had conversed for hours about natural philosophy, politics, the arts, and their mutual enthusiasm for Ossian.[38] Jefferson was no doubt equally impressed with his guest. As a young man Chastellux had come to the attention of the *économistes* Turgot and Morellet after submitting a letter to the *Journal Encyclopédique* attacking the government's protection of cotton manufacturing monopolies. He soon became a popular figure in French society and was intimate with *philosophes* such as D'Alembert, Diderot, D'Holbach, and Helvétius. He himself had written a work entitled *De la Félicité Publique* urging governments to concern themselves solely with the promotion of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number of individuals." His efforts gained for him the applause of his colleagues and the coveted prize of election to membership in the French Academy.[39]

Abbé Morellet, like Chastellux, had earned renown both as an *économiste* and a *philosophe,* and had recently been elected to the French Academy. He was connected with Lord Shelburne and the English circle at Bowood whose membership included Jeremy Bentham, Richard Price, and Joseph Priestley. Morellet was particularly interested in problems of commerce. He had prepared a translation of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations,* but set it aside when another translation was published. Shelburne credited him with having lib-

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36. See Frank W. Garrison, "Jefferson and the Physiocrats," *The Freeman,* VIII (October 31, 1923), 180-182.

37. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia,* intro. Thomas Perkins Abernethy (New York, 1964), 157.

38. Marquis de Chastellux, *Travels in North America in the Years 1780, 1781 and 1782,* trans. Howard C. Rice, Jr. (2 vols., Chapel Hill, 1963), II, 392.

39. Howard C. Rice, Jr. "Introduction," 1-41 in *Travels in North America,* I, 5; John B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress, An Inquiry into Its Origin and Growth* (London, 1928), 186.

eralized his own idea on commerce and claimed the Abbé's ideas had influenced him in his negotiation of the Peace of 1783.[40]

America appeared to Morellet as the hope of the world. He had become acquainted with Franklin while visiting Lord Shelburne in 1772, and the American no doubt encouraged his interest in the new world. He was anxious to inform his fellow countrymen about the progress of America, and in 1781 commenced a work on the colonies, consulting Franklin whenever necessary.

Morellet's devotion to America and to principles of free trade would have been sufficient to recommend him to Jefferson. And, as it turned out, he was in a position to be of particular service to the American as a translator of the *Notes on the State of Virginia.* Jefferson was not wholly satisfied with Morellet's arrangement of the book and was disappointed when the Abbé advised against appending the Act for Establishing Religious Freedom out of fear of the censor. He found it difficult to be persuaded by Morellet's logic, since the Act was being printed in several other books such as the *Encyclopédie Méthodique.*[41] Morellet also omitted the draft constitution for Virginia that Jefferson had prepared in 1783. The document provided for a clear separation and balance of powers, doctrines strongly opposed by the followers of Turgot, and this may have been the cause of Morellet's refusal to include it in the edition he was preparing.[42] The incident illustrates well the limits of cooperation between Americans and French liberals. Many were quite willing to act as American propagandists, but only so long as it served their own ends.

Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours, another member of the physiocratic school, was able to render Jefferson more concrete aid in commercial matters because of his connection with the government. Du Pont was closely identified with Quesnay, Malesherbes, Turgot, and d'Argenson and had written several tracts propagating the tenets of physiocracy. He became the confidential adviser of Vergennes in 1781 when the latter was appointed minister of foreign

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40. André Morellet, *Mémoires sur le dix-huitième siècle et sur la révolution* (2 vols., Paris, 1821), I, 11, 38-39, 268-270; Campenon, "André Morellet," Joseph F. and Louis G. Michaud (eds.), *Biographie Universelle* (85 vols., Paris, 1811-62), XXX, 118-124.

41. Morellet to Jefferson, September 11, 1786, Boyd, X, 350.

42. This is the opinion of Professor Palmer, who suggests that Morellet, as a disciple of Turgot and an associate of reform groups in England, found it inconvenient to the cause to have a prominent American "demanding a more independent executive and such 'British' ideas as a separation and balance of powers." Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: the Challenge,* 276.

affairs. After Vergennes' death in 1787, the finance minister Calonne retained him in an effort to associate his administration with the principles of Turgot. With the accession of Brienne, his role in the government ceased and he became associated with the "patriot party" in opposition to privilege and the claims of the parlements.[43]

In Jefferson's commercial negotiations Du Pont, with his "good general principles on subjects of commerce, and friendly dispositions" toward the United States, was a powerful ally. Anxious to cultivate his good opinion, Jefferson recommended Du Pont's son Victor to the particular attention of the American secretary for foreign affairs, John Jay. His letter reflected the value of the elder Du Pont's services: "I wish his son could be so well noticed as to make a favorable report to his father; he would I think be gratified by it, and his good dispositions be strengthened, and rendered further useful to us." [44]

Possibly no other person in France was more intellectually compatible with Jefferson than the Marquis de Condorcet. These two men, so alike in their hopes for humanity, were introduced by one who enjoyed the friendship of both, the Duc de la Rochefoucauld. They traveled in the same circles of Paris society and their paths crossed frequently.[45] The Frenchman's respect for the American minister was evident in his characterization of him as deserving of a place among "the philosophers and liberal men of all nations." [46]

Mathematician, economist, philosopher, and revolutionary, Condorcet represented better than anyone else the summation of the many currents of Enlightenment thought in eighteenth-century France. Like so many of Jefferson's acquaintances, he wrote for the *Encyclopédie* and was a member of the French Academy. In his economic principles, he gave his full allegiance to Turgot and the physiocratic school, and proved his devotion by writing a *Vie de Turgot*

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43. Boulée, "Dupont de Nemours," *Biographie Universelle*, LXIII, 201-207; *Life of Eleuthère-Irénée du Pont from Contemporary Correspondence, 1778-1834*, trans. B. G. du Pont (Newark, Delaware, 1923-27), 19, 81; for the most recent work on Du Pont, see Ambrose Saricks, *Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1965).

44. Jefferson to Jay, November 3, 1787, Boyd, XII, 314.

45. Unfortunately for the historian, Jefferson evidently saw Du Pont, Condorcet, La Rochefoucauld, and Lafayette so frequently in person that he seldom found it necessary to correspond with them. Thus one is left with the knowledge that they collaborated on certain projects, discussed liberal reforms, and quite clearly were in close contact during the eventful meeting of the Estates General, but there is almost no way of proving precisely what transpired among them.

46. Condorcet to Jefferson, September 12, 1789, Boyd, XV, 419.

after his master's death.[47] As a loyal disciple of Turgot, Condorcet favored a single assembly and frequent elections as the only means of destroying the power of an entrenched aristocracy. Up until the eve of the revolution, he preferred a constitutional monarchy as best suited to conditions in France at that time. However, in principle he was a republican, having declared in his *Vie de Turgot* that "the republican condition is best of all." [48]

Despite his reputation as a mathematician and philosopher, he was not solely concerned with constructing a logical system. He was easily aroused by humanitarian causes and nothing offended his sense of justice more than the evil of slavery and the slave trade. In 1781 he wrote a strong indictment of slavery, entitled *Reflections on Negro Slavery,* which so impressed Jefferson that he began a translation of it.[49]

A study of the writings of Jefferson and Condorcet reveals a large area of agreement in matters of political philosophy.[50] Thus it is reasonable to assume they found numerous occasions to discuss ideas they held in common. Because he was no longer a member of the government during Jefferson's tour of duty, Condorcet's services to the United States were less prominent than Du Pont's. Entirely in keeping with his retiring nature, he preferred to work quietly behind the scenes. For example, he along with Jefferson urged Mazzei to write his *Récherches.* As the work proceeded, he was always willing to give his advice if requested. And his wife offered to prepare the French translation of the completed work. There is some evidence that he may have provided the statistics for Lafayette's argument in support of American tobacco presented before the Committee of Commerce in 1786.[51] But his greatest efforts were reserved for the advancement of liberty and equality for his own countrymen and for the enslaved Negroes.

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47. J. Salwyn Schapiro, *Condorcet and the Rise of Liberalism* (New York, 1934), 73.

48. Alexandre Koyré, "Condorcet," *Journal of the History of Ideas,* IX (April, 1948), 143-144.

49. For "Jefferson's Notes from Condorcet on Slavery," see Boyd, XIV, 494-498. The translation was evidently never completed.

50. Besides sharing a commitment to the generally accepted principles of the Enlightenment, the two men agreed on a number of specific matters: the necessity of a declaration of rights, faith in unfettered reason, the importance of local self-government in a free state, the superiority of an agricultural society, and the importance of public education in a democracy.

51. The evidence is not conclusive. The person who assisted Lafayette may have been Du Pont or Bérard, but a contemporary has said it was Condorcet. For a more thorough exposition of the problem, see the editorial note by Julian Boyd, IX, 344-346.

The friendship of the Duc de la Rochefoucauld was significant for Jefferson both because of the high merits of the man himself and because he, along with Lafayette, provided an introduction to the liberal French nobility. He was recommended to Jefferson by Mazzei, Crèvecoeur, and Chastellux, all of whom praised him as a man of genius and warm sympathies.[52] He and his mother, the influential Duchesse d'Anville, opened their Paris hotel and their château, La Roche-Guyon, to partisans of reform and to individuals of literary and artistic talent. The La Rochefoucaulds, one of the most renowned families in all of France, throughout the years attracted to their gatherings representatives from the world of ideas—among them D'Alembert, Condorcet, Raynal, and Turgot—as well as members of the enlightened nobility such as Choiseul, Rohan, Maurepas, Beauvau, and Castries.[53]

The Duke himself was both a patron of the arts and an amateur of the sciences. His garden was devoted to "experiments for the improvement of knowledge," and must have been a source of interest to Jefferson.[54] Like his friend and protégé Condorcet, La Rochefoucauld was sympathetic to the cause of the Negro. He was an active member of the society called Amis des Noirs and rose with Condorcet in the National Assembly to demand a discussion of the lot of the Negroes who, he argued, were also entitled to an enjoyment of their rights.[55]

The Duke was a warm partisan of the United States, although not as vocal as some of his fellow Americanists. He did, however, make one notable effort to make America better understood, and it involved considerable time and labor on his part. At the suggestion of Franklin, he translated into French the text of all of the American constitutions, hoping thereby to present an accurate account of its political institutions. Since he did not share the Turgotists' distrust of bicameral legislatures, the work involved no compromise of principles for him.

Possibly the greatest service La Rochefoucauld was able to perform for Jefferson was an indirect one. He was evidently aware of the need for accurate information about America to counteract the

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52. "Mazzei's Memoranda Regarding Persons and Affairs in Paris," c. July, 1784, Boyd, VII, 386; Crèvecoeur to Jefferson, July 15, 1784, Boyd, VII, 376; Crèvecoeur to Jefferson, September 1, 1784, Boyd, VII, 414.

53. Mornet, *La pensée francaise au xviii em siècle,* 193-194.

54. "Mazzei's Memoranda," c. July, 1784, Boyd, VII, 386.

55. Beaulieu, "Louis-Alexandre de la Rochefoucauld," *Biographie Universelle,* XXXVIII, 310-314.

effect of the derogatory articles appearing in the English press. It was probably late 1785 when he learned that Jean Nicholas Démeunier was planning an article on the United States for the *Encyclopédie Méthodique*. Obviously Démeunier would require some assistance, and so the Duke wrote Jefferson, requesting him to grant the writer an interview. The American minister, he assured Démeunier, would provide him with the "best advice." [56] Aware of the wide audience this publication would reach, Jefferson arranged several conferences and went over his manuscript carefully, making numerous corrections. Their joint labors resulted in one of the most accurate descriptions of America to appear in a French publication. Besides a description of the United States, the article included the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom.[57]

Without a doubt Jefferson's closest associate was France's most prominent Americanist, the Marquis de Lafayette, whom Jefferson had known since the days of the revolution. Lafayette's attachment to the cause of America is well known. Unlike the *philosophes* and *économistes,* he had little to offer that was original in the way of philosophical enlightenment, for the Virginian was quite clearly his intellectual superior. However, Lafayette was of supreme importance to Jefferson throughout his stay in France. He had influential friends at court and among the enlightened nobility, and he did not hesitate to seek their good offices if he thought they could aid the American cause.

Lafayette was unrivaled in his zeal as an American propagandist and Jefferson frequently called upon him to plant items favorable to the United States in the French press. In the realm of commercial relations, he worked tirelessly to secure additional trade concessions for his "adopted country." Jefferson commended him both for his enthusiasm for America and for his diligence in mastering the hitherto foreign field of commercial questions in order to be of service.[58]

Whether at the Lafayette residence in Paris or at the family estate at Chaville, one could always find an assemblage of liberals. A meeting attended by David Humphreys, secretary to the American legation, was undoubtedly typical. It included, he recalled, "such friends of America as these, the Duke de Rochefoucault, the Marquises Condorcy [sic] and Chattelux [sic], Messrs. Metza

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56. La Rochefoucauld to Jefferson, January 4, 1786, Boyd, IX, 150.
57. Echeverria, *Mirage in the West,* 123.
58. Jefferson to Madison, January 30, 1787, Boyd, XI, 95.

[Mazzei?], Crèvecoeur etc. to hear a discussion on American politics and commerce by a Mr. Warville . . . ." Equally typical was the "declamatory" tone of Warville's presentation.[59]

The place Brissot de Warville, the man who would become the head of the French government in 1792, occupied in the complicated network of Jefferson's associates is rather uncertain. Many of Jefferson's friends were involved with him in one way or another. Jefferson himself evidently came into frequent contact with him, yet appeared to avoid any close or official connection.

Born the son of an innkeeper near Chartres, Brissot determined to spread revolutionary ideas through journalism. At the salon of Madame d'Houdetôt he became acquainted with Franklin and Crèvecoeur, and in a very short time he was an avowed partisan of America, seeing in that country the realization of his dreams for France.[60]

In his career as a publicist and revolutionary, he was frequently assisted by the banker, Etienne Clavière, who had been forced to leave his native Geneva after the failure of the revolution of 1782. In 1786 Brissot and Clavière collaborated in the writing of an essay entitled *De la France et des Etats Unis*. Starting from the premise that France and the United States had need of one another's products, they urged France to take action quickly before the Americans reverted to their former habits of trading with England, who would be most willing to monopolize the business of her former colonies. The best enticement, they argued, was a rapid removal or lowering of protective duties and the establishment of freedom of commerce both internally and externally.[61] Jefferson read at least part of the work in manuscript and declared himself pleased with its Introduction, where the danger of American commerce reverting to England was emphasized. He found particular satisfaction in those passages which mirrored his own personal conviction that the United States would be "more virtuous, more free, and more happy, emploied [sic] in agriculture, than as carriers or manufacturers." [62] The work as published contained traces of both Jefferson's and Lafayette's influence.

With a similar goal—to encourage friendly relations between France and the United States and to draw from the American ex-

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59. Humphreys to Jefferson, March 17, 1786, Boyd, IX, 329-330.
60. Eloise Ellery, *Brissot de Warville: A Study in the History of the French Revolution* (Boston and New York, 1915), 24-25.
61. *Ibid.*, 47-48.
62. Jefferson to Brissot, August 16, 1786, Boyd, X, 261-262.

ample ideas instructive for reform in France—Brissot, in union with Clavière, Crèvecoeur, and Nicholas Bergasse, a liberal lawyer and devoté of mesmerism, founded the Gallo-American Society. In March 1787 Brissot wrote Jefferson inviting him to join the organization and enclosed a prospectus with the society's aims.[63] Despite the obvious pro-American tone of the organization, there is no record of a written response from Jefferson, although he may have given an oral reply, nor does his name ever appear to have been associated with the society. The organization never advanced beyond the embryonic stage, and evidently never attracted any members other than its founders.[64]

Early in 1788 the tireless Brissot turned his attention to the cause of the Negro and, inspired by an English anti-slavery organization, established a French counterpart called the Amis des Noirs to agitate for the abolition of the slave trade. The humanitarian crusade aroused the sympathy of many prominent men, and in a short time the society boasted a large and respected membership: Clavière, Mirabeau, Adrien Duport, the Lameths, the Marquis de Bourges, the Prince de Beauvau, the chemist Lavoisier, Volney, Mazzei, Lafayette, the Ducs de la Rochefoucauld, and Condorcet, who was elected president.[65]

Brissot extended an invitation to Jefferson, explaining that it would be a betrayal of the cause of humanity to exclude him from the organization. The American sent off an immediate reply. "Nobody," he asserted, "wishes more ardently to see an abolition not only of the trade but of the condition of slavery." However, prudence counseled moderation. As a public servant he did not think it wise to give a "too public demonstration" of his wishes until those whom he served had an opportunity "to give their voice against this practice . . . ." [66] There seems little reason to doubt his sincerity. He himself had spoken out unequivocally on the evils of slavery in

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63. Bernard Faÿ, *The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America*, trans. Ramond Guthrie (New York, 1927), 240; Louis Gottschalk, *Lafayette between the American and the French Revolution* (Chicago, 1950), 310; Brissot to Jefferson, March 8, 1787, Boyd, XI, 204.

64. Louis André Vigneras, "La Société Gallo-Américaine de 1787," *Bulletin de l'Institut Francais de Washington*, Nouvelle Série, II (December, 1952), 62-67.

65. Claude Pérroud, "La Société francaise des Amis des Noirs," *La Révolution Francaise*, LXIX (Mars-Avril, 1916), 122-147; Léon Cahen, "La Société des Amis des Noirs et Condorcet," *La Révolution Francaise*, L (14 Juin, 1906), 481-511. Altogther there were about 141 members, 33 of whom were nobles, 11 lawyers, and 26 from the haute bourgeoisie.

66. Brissot to Jefferson, February 10, 1788; Jefferson to Brissot, February 11, 1788, Boyd, XII, 577-578.

the *Notes on the State of Virginia,* but had been somewhat doubtful of the wisdom of making known his opinion until the public mind was prepared to accept it. And his attitude was much the same when Brissot invited him to join the Amis des Noirs. "Without serving the cause here," he explained, "it might render me less able to serve it beyond the water." [67]

Even though his reason for refusing membership in the Amis des Noirs was a good one, Jefferson appears to have taken particular care to keep his relationship with Brissot on a formal basis. At first glance, this might seem peculiar, since Brissot was just as devoted to strengthening Franco-American ties and to furthering the cause of humanity as Jefferson's other French associates. Unfortunately, his activities were considerably less acceptable to the French government. In all of his undertakings Brissot's primary motive was nothing less than a total reformation or overthrow of the existing order. He and his associates were known to serve the political ambitions of the Duc d'Orléans.[68] Although he was undoubtedly sincere in advocating Franco-American ties, the discussion of commerce in *De la France et des Etats Unis* was merely a pretext for presenting American prosperity in such glowing terms that Frenchmen would be moved to assert their own demands for liberty.[69] Similarly the Gallo-American Society, despite its failure to attract many members, would have been an excellent means of drawing together like-minded men who could work together to spread information concerning the advances being made in America.[70] The fact that the meetings were to be held at the Chancellerie d'Orléans, implying the blessing of the Duc d'Orléans, made the society even more suspect.[71] If the Amis des Noirs had been established for the same

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67. For his doubts about distributing the *Notes* see Jefferson to Madison, May 11, 1785, Boyd, VIII, 147-148; the quotation is from Jefferson to Brissot, February 11, 1788, Boyd, XII, 578.

68. In 1787 Brissot was working on plans for a revolution to be effected in collaboration with the party surrounding the Duc d'Orléans. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: the Challenge,* 261; see J. P. Brissot, *Correspondance et Papiers* (Paris, 1912), 150-160, for Brissot's copy of the plans.

69. His purpose, he stated, was to persuade his "compatriots to imitate their [the Americans'] conduct and recover their liberty." *Mémoires de Brissot sur ses Contemporains et la Révolution Francaise* (2 vols., Paris, 1830), II, 413.

70. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: the Challenge,* p. 261; Faÿ, *The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America,* pp. 240-241. Brissot's idea of the best way to foment revolution in France was learned from Bergasse, who told him, "One must unite men under the pretext of scientific experiments [referring to the Mesmer Society] but in truth to overthrow despotism." Brissot, *Mémoires,* II, 415.

71. Vigneras, "La Société Gallo-Americaine," 65.

end, Brissot must have been disappointed, because the society attracted wide support by virtue of its more humanitarian purpose.

Jefferson must have been aware of the true nature of Brissot's projects, and a sense of propriety as American minister, as well as his own preference for gradual reform so evident in his advice to the French patriots, must have warned him to maintain an attitude of strict formality. He apparently considered Brissot too far in advance of conditions in France and feared the risk of an open association with his projects.

During his stay in Paris, Jefferson deferred to French customs in many aspects of his daily life. His Paris residence featured French furnishings and cuisine, and many of the ornaments of French culture were to remain a part of him throughout the rest of his life. The influence of French society and thought on his intellectual makeup is not so readily observed and evaluated. Any such assessment must take into account the fact that Jefferson and his Americanist friends were engaged in a mutual exchange. Although he would never be the "professional American" Franklin was, Jefferson did represent a link with the country whose example had become so meaningful to French reformers. From the moment they staked the justification of their arguments on the success of the American experiment, they devoted their efforts to keeping the American image before the French public. In this endeavor the American minister was important both as a source of information and as living proof of the progress being made in the new world.

In both instances Jefferson acquitted himself admirably. His encyclopedic mind provided a fund of information, although his insistance upon accuracy undoubtedly exasperated some overly zealous Americanists. And if French liberals wanted proof of the progress of enlightenment in America, they could have asked for no finer example than the cultivated Virginian. In refinement and education he was the equal of the finest the old world had to offer. Beyond that, as a legislator he was the incarnation of what the *philosophes* only dreamed of being—a liberal thinker whose participation in the public realm allowed him an active role in the pursuit of progress. Jefferson had the practical experience French liberals so obviously lacked, and his opinions were respected by many who were aware of their own dependence on theory alone.

On the other hand, Jefferson found the French Americanists equally essential to the success of his mission. They had helped to create in France an atmosphere favorable to the new republic and provided him with an entrée into French society which enabled him

to cement the ties of friendship between leading citizens of both countries. Franco-American amity represented one of Jefferson's principal goals. Not only did he insist upon the necessity of the French alliance as a counterweight to British enmity; he also found a pro-American atmosphere essential to successful commercial negotiations. Even the most despotic governments, he observed, were responsive to public opinion.[72]

Undoubtedly Jefferson's attachment to France was not solely a matter of convenience. His appreciation of French culture was genuine, as was his love for the French people, whom he described as being "of the most benevolent, the most gay, and amiable character of which the human form is susceptible." [73] Indeed he never spoke of French philosophy with the enthusiasm he reserved for French culture and refinement.

Neither his desire to secure French support nor his sympathy for French culture blinded him to the less attractive aspects of eighteenth-century France. During the entire period of his residence in France, he remained critical of the existence of widespread poverty. In polite society he had "endeavored to examine . . . the condition of the great" in order to compare their happiness with that enjoyed by the average American.[74] His compatriots' situation, he concluded, was decidedly more enviable than that of Europe's most dazzling aristocrats.

In addition to convincing him of the superiority of the American system, Jefferson's observation of conditions in France obviously made him more responsive to the aims of French reformers. But this produced no basic change in his political philosophy. He was an active supporter of reform before coming to France, and his new experience only deepened his conviction that man was best served by a republican form of government.[75]

His French associates were all partisans of reform, but it would be entirely misleading to term them revolutionaries. Only Brissot, whose company Jefferson apparently avoided, could lay claim to that title. Among his other acquaintances, Condorcet was probably the

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72. Jefferson to Monroe, June 17, 1785, Boyd, VIII, 228.
73. Jefferson to George Wythe, August 13, 1786, Boyd, X, 244.
74. Jefferson to Bellini, September 30, 1785, Boyd, VIII, 568.
75. See, for example, his letter to Benjamin Hawkins, in which he states, "If all the evils which can arise among us from the republican form of our government from this day to the day of judgment could be put into a scale against what this country suffers from its monarchical form in a week, or England in a month, the latter would preponderate . . . ." August 4, 1787, Boyd, XI, 684.

most radical and he opposed the calling of the Estates General, preferring gradual reform through the provincial assemblies. The ardor of several of the Americanists, for example Morellet and Madame de Tessé, had already begun to cool by August 1789. The others, notably Condorcet, Mazzei, and Du Pont, soon coalesced with Lafayette in the Society of 1789 in an effort to reconcile the opposing forces and restrain the excesses of the Jacobins.[76] Far from infecting Jefferson with revolutionary principles, his French associates tended to isolate him from the real centers of discontent, the bourgeoisie and lower classes. No doubt Jefferson felt most comfortable in the society of gentlemen reformers who both literally and figuratively spoke his language. But as long as he persisted in the belief that these young, conscience-stricken nobles would effect a reform in French society, he was apt to be misled. For neither were they firm enough in their commitment to reform nor could they muster sufficient strength to carry the rest of their class with them.

Nearly all of Jefferson's French associates considered themselves followers of the *philosophes,* but this does not necessarily explain why he was attracted to them. Their sympathy for the American cause was a far more decisive factor. Certainly there were discussions of political philosophy, but for the most part these were initiated by the French who were eager to draw upon the knowledge and experience of the American minister. Jefferson was more interested in their talents as propagandists than in their philosophy. He had been sent to Europe, not to absorb its learning and culture, but to gain its respect and, more specifically, to secure the bonds of Franco-American friendship.

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76. Georges Lefebvre, *The French Revolution from its Origins to 1793,* trans. Elizabeth Moss Evanson (New York, 1962), 136-137; R. C. Garlick, Jr., *Philip Mazzei, Friend of Jefferson* (Baltimore, 1933), 127.